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**STEPHEN GWYNN**

# Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF  
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

STEPHEN  
G W Y N N



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TO  
SENHORA DONA GUILHERMINA  
SUGGIA

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THAT wise tolerance which enables a man to write with equal understanding of Mahaffy, the learned Provost of Trinity, and of James Kelly, the illiterate Shanachy, is a rare quality indeed. Yet it is precisely that which gives Stephen Gwynn's contribution to the letters and politics of our times its special value. He is an ideal essayist because he has just those qualities of balance, discernment, and humour which are essential to good work in this form. And the same characteristics have enabled him through all these troubled years to write of Irish affairs and to play his part in them after such fashion as to earn the regard of all sections. The following essays will indicate clearly enough where his predilections lie—Ireland, France, books, and fishing. Yet in all he exercises judgment. He is a true son of Ireland, but he does not scruple to remind perfervid patriots that "it is possible to be Irish while using the English language." Greatly though he values the old legends, he values a spirit of understanding more than all the twists of an antique tongue. With pride he ranks himself as one of those who are "in love with France, and like to hear France praised," and when the call to arms came he went joyfully because he went to the help of France. "Some of us, at least," he explains, "felt that we had acquired a kind of citizenship." As for books and fishing, these essays will reveal the modesty with which he speaks of his own achievements and the generous enthusiasm which he ever has for the doings of others.



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Mr Gwynn was born in Ireland in 1864, and educated at Oxford. He began to occupy himself in the pursuit of letters in 1890, and has been actively engaged in it ever since, as the Bibliography will show. For twelve years he sat in Parliament as a Nationalist member.

F. H. P.

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## WHEN SUGGIA WAS PLAYING

WHEN Suggia was playing, all the other half-dozen privileged people in the room knew what she said: her bow spoke the common language of Europe: only to me, she might as well have been chanting poems in an unknown tongue on themes I had no guess of. There was interposed a barrier, denser than any that the curse of Babel created; for a language may be learnt, but those who lack the faculty of music can never come to understand its speech. Yet even through this barrier a great artist was able to penetrate to that sense of rhythmic form which is the common base of all the arts. Through their ears the others lay accessible to Suggia: on me she must play through the eyes. Through my eyes I must catch for the first time some glimpse of what music is.

To colour and form there was added this new element of sound, mastering and swamping colour, but heightening and transfiguring all the play of shifting mass and line and poise. It was as if I watched a dance; and yet no dance has ever moved me like it: the very imperfections of the visible rhythm kept me aware that the real dance was invisible: that rigid partner of hers forced her to almost ungainly motions, like those of strong rowers with stiff oars in a surge.

In the visible impression, strength dominated always: the tense vibrant body, the arms, flat and edged with muscle, like a man's, the powerful shoulders, had nothing of what is called graceful; as for prettiness, it never came within a league of that lady. Beauty,

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the obvious plain indisputable compulsion of beauty, flashed at you in moments, now of motion, now of poise, in the long sweep of the bow, or the half instant of arrest when movement completed itself, and all lines fell together in a harmony. But beauty in the larger sense, the beauty of vital energy that Epstein seeks after, that Rodin so often found, was there always: the beauty that has roughness and force in it, like some of the hoarse disturbing notes she sent clamouring.

It was a delight to see her, before each bout began, sit up alert, balance and adjust her bow as a fencer balances his foil, then settle herself with that huge tortoise between her knees, like a jockey sitting down to ride: erect at first and watchful, till gradually, caught by the stream she created, she swung with it; gently, sleepily, languidly, until the mood shifted, the stream grew a torrent and the group rocked and swayed almost to wreckage. Or again, she would be sitting forward, taking her mount by the head, curbing it, fretting it, with imperious staccato movements, mastering it completely—then letting it free to caracole easily, or once more break into full course, gathering itself in, extending itself, in a wild gallop. She was creating sound till you could see it: the music seemed to flow like running water, up her arms, over her neck; one felt that seated behind her one could see it coursing down her shoulders and her spine, with the whirls and eddies of a mountain river.

Only the face remained apart; in it was something different: the face with its closed eyes belonged to us who were played upon rather than to her who played: it was the artist in the artist's other *rôle*, her own audience, listening to herself, experiencing first and more than all others the emotion which her art evoked. That rapt and passive countenance, that swift,

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ordered, disciplined activity of every fibre of her body—disciplined till all was instinctive as the motions of a flying bird—showed once for all the double nature, speaker and listener at once, actor and spectator, which must be the artist's.

And then at the end, with some long-drawn sighing fall, or with one abrupt vehement clang of sound, she would finish, would raise her bow high, in a gesture of dismissal, break the magic—and come to the top like a diver, a little breathless and smiling.

That is what music meant to the unmusical, when Suggia was playing.

*From "Country Life"*

## THE LAKE AMONG THE HILLS

IT is a little lake, only about a mile in circuit; it has no great repute among anglers, you are lucky any day that you get a salmon there; the trout, though plenty, are small and poorly fed; there are no reeds or water-lilies, no special feature of beauty, but a long beach of silvery sand. And yet it will shine like a jewel in my memory, among happy fishing-grounds one of the happiest of all.

For, especially as one grows older, the pleasure of fishing is not to be measured by what you catch. A good day is the day when you get more than you expected; I have come back glum enough from a famous fishing in Connemara with ten or a dozen pounds' weight of sea-trout in the basket—a catch that would have uplifted me mightily on the lake among the hills. But beyond all other charms is the charm of discovery which makes an adventure of the sport. My little lake was so lonely and inaccessible that very few strangers had ever fished there; so remote that all about it there lingered an old-world life full of antique quaintness and a generous courtesy seldom to be found on the beaten track.

We went there first, a picnic party, not for serious fishing; midges beset the land, and on the lake itself no fish would move; but, for all that, I fell in love with the place and determined to come back to it with a friend who was always ready to start off with the essential rods and whatever else was practicable strapped on to bicycles.

So accoutred, we crossed half a wild county, rode

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up to the lake, left our machines at one of the two cottages which could be seen, and plunged across a causeway through bog to the other in search of a boatman. We got him, not without difficulty, for he was away up on the mountain-side looking after his cattle; and a real mountaineer was this M'Hugh; tall, gaunt, shy, awkward—a man who might be dangerous if you touched his precious holding, but in all the offices of life as kind and serviceable a giant as ever I met with—and as keen a fisherman. We began catching trout at once, for it was a pleasant day of light wind, warm, with sunny intervals; and after a short while a salmon rose to me. To my thinking there is nothing so delightful as that kind of fishing when you fish with trout-flies and the lightest cast on which you can hope to hold a five-pounder, and you take whatever comes along. I got that fish; then after two or three hours and lunch we drifted down again, and I hooked and killed another fish, besides a couple of sea-trout; as for the brown fellows, they kept coming in all the time. Only that the breeze dropped, we might have got a couple more salmon; and the same trouble beset us next day, but I got a third fish and lost a fourth. Altogether, it made mighty pleasant sport, for there was none of the discomfort which often attends salmon-fishing (salmon take best in a lash of wind and rain); and the constant rise of trout diversified the long hours of casting from a boat. Only one thing troubled me, and that was my friend's bad luck—specially annoying, as he had then never caught a salmon. He had his revenge later on, when we came there on a day so windy that the boat could not be kept on the water, and we began to fish off two rocks twenty yards apart, where salmon were said to lie. Very soon I heard him shout, and, sure enough, he



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had one, and great was the excitement over the long business of getting him ashore. We fished on, and then changed our stations; within five minutes, on the same water which I had flogged till I was tired, he hooked another fish and had the very rare experience of killing his first two salmon within half an hour of each other. That day I went home empty-handed of fish, but for consolation I was given a hare which M'Hugh's collie dog started as we were launching the boat, and coursed down the half-mile of sandy strip, right among our very feet and all the paraphernalia of rods and landing-nets, until at the end of the sand the hare doubled round a hummock of heather, and the smart dog nipped it at the turn. I never saw as pretty a bit of poaching.

But the thing which above all else endeared the valley to me was the charm of the people. I took to staying in one of the cottages; and it was delightful, while your trout were frizzling in the pan and a new-killed chicken was being roasted, to sit and talk with the comely, dignified woman of the house and her foxy-bearded husband. He described to me, in more detail than I have heard it elsewhere, the processes of poteen-making, the character of the whisky derived from barley, and its various substitutes ("treacle-whisky," made from molasses, he spoke well of, to my surprise).

His poteen-making days were past, though, he told me, and he would not tell me why. His wife laughed in her corner. "It was the fairies put him past it," she said. I drew out of him that once, visiting the still alone at night, he "seen something" that he took for a warning: and on the balance, he was just as glad. He was "as well wanting the poteen," he thought; though one was conscious that he felt a

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talent wasted. He had been able in his day to drain a jugful of the raw spirit straight off as if it were milk.

If I went back there to-morrow, even now after many years, I should feel I was going to friends whose welcome would always be the same. M'Hugh would leave his hay or corn to row me, as I have known him do, though with real risk to the crop, sooner than disappoint a friend who had come from far. Also my vanity would believe that he did so in respect for my prowess, since, on the whole, I caught more fish there than my neighbours, and often on unlikely days. One such day is always written among my small triumphs. I had gone up by chance with a singer of Italian birth, whose equipment was that picturesque thing which the Latin sportsman always turns out; and we fished disconsolately, for it was all but hopelessly calm and even the trout disdained us. Other anglers had given up; still we stuck to it, and at last I saw the big, swirling eddy and the width of a fine tail as the fish went down with my fly. For half an hour we saw no more of him; but a few heavy rushes convinced me that I had hold of something better than the ordinary five or six pound grilse that we reckoned on there; and when at last the fish jumped M'Hugh declared we would never kill him on my tackle. I must say my Italian friend behaved like one of the saints; never have I seen any angler take such pleasure and interest in another's luck; and when at last I gaffed the fish he solemnly announced the time—fifty-five minutes—and congratulated me on the "*maestria*" I had shown. By this time I sincerely hope he has convinced himself that it was he, and not another, who killed that handsome though coppery ten-pounder on the lake among the hills.

*From "Duffer's Luck"*

## READING ALOUD

WE hear—most of us with an incredulous wonder—of gifted beings who can enjoy reading the printed score of a piece of music. Probably no one has yet been found to assert that he or she would rather read music than hear it performed; but to this point we may very well come if the development of that peculiar sense by which we enjoy literature be carried much further. Nine people out of ten will say that they would sooner read a book, or even a poem, than hear it read to them; they will suspend judgment, appealing from the untrained ear to the other trained and trusted faculty which operates through the eye. And yet the art of putting words together should imply that the words for their full effect are meant to be uttered, just as surely as music is meant to be played or sung. Nobody would say that a poem pleases his eye. What it is precisely in the modern reader that a poem does please, would not be so easy to define. It is not the sense of sight; yet for many of us it is probably true that the colour and associations of a given word (which are to the artist in words what fabric, sheen, and colour are to a weaver in framing his pattern) begin to cluster around the physical image of certain letters arranged in a certain way rather than about the sound of spoken syllables. And in so far as this is true, literature is on the way to perdition. No art can, without injury, divorce itself from the gratification of some human sense, and the function of the eye in reading is purely mechanical and pleasureless; whereas that of the ear in listening has its

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own pleasure wedded to it. Cheap printing is destroying literature. Let us consider the matter historically and see whether this assertion be too sweeping.

Poetry, which is the oldest and most indestructible of all the arts, can never be divorced from sound. It grew into being independent of pen and ink; it continues still in very great measure independent of these. The most hardened of us, who make our sentences in prose concurrently with the act of writing, and who very often cannot frame a thought in words without the opportunity of thus visualising it (listen to the speeches of literary men), even we, the tritest hacks of the pen, when we take in hand to write verse, as must sometimes happen, throw the pen to the devil. Verse demands to be constructed first of all as a combination of sounds; it demands to be appreciated by the test of utterance. Your reviewer in a hurry will stop and read aloud to himself a stanza or a whole poem; catch him doing that with any passage in a novel! Why should he? He is not meant to. Prose grew up by the aid of letters, and postulates a book, written or printed. Yet, so long as the book was a rarity, prose was in this respect on a footing with poetry, that it had to count on being read aloud. Whoever wrote in the sixteenth or seventeenth century wrote to the ear, not merely to the eye; hence (in their different excellences) Bunyan's flowing utterance, Milton's flaming periods. Men had not yet learnt the trick of the shortened and condensed sentence, so convenient to the eye which does not easily carry the mind through involved clauses: they had not yet acquired the peculiar tone and idiom of the written word which is designed to convey its effect without the aid of actual speech. In Swift's finished manner this art reached its perfection, for the written word was not

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yet wholly divorced from the cadences of a man's voice speaking. It was left for Johnson to complete the severance; and Macaulay, modifying Johnson's methods, made the emphatic toneless prose which has since that day been employed by the persons who are called publicists. Away vanished all the subtle, delicate inflections of Addison and of Goldsmith—men who wrote in an age when the paper or the novel was still constantly read aloud in a family circle or even in a coffee-house not yet littered with prints. Since Macaulay's period, since the day of the penny press, every man has written, every man writes, with the knowledge that the word which goes to the reader must reach its billet through the eye. The result is that most of us write, as nearly all of us read, in a monotone; and those who escape from the monotone do so often by vehemence and at a sacrifice of delicacy.

This growing disease of literature, this divorce of modulated thought from modulated sound, is presumably without remedy. Mankind always gets in the long run what the mass of mankind prefers, and custom imposes itself. All educated people would declare a preference for the old-fashioned magazines over the modern jumble of photographs and advertisements; yet even those who declare the preference will buy, nine times out of ten, what every one else buys. In the same way the kind of impatience which sends a reader galloping through ten bad books, instead of taking his leisure over one good one, is general in humanity; yet those who read fast cannot hear the sound of what they read, even by an intellectual process. The more easily books are available the faster people will read, the less they will dwell on what is written, and books will undoubtedly be multiplied increasingly. The remedy, if remedy were to be found, would surely lie in a

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revival of the disused and discredited art which is not relegated to governesses, to old ladies' companions, to vicars' wives in charge of mothers' meetings, and to the reading-desk on Sundays? *Post hoc* and *propter hoc*, in this case as in so many, interchange in a vicious circle. People prefer to read to themselves, because so few read aloud with grace and discretion; few can read aloud as intelligent human beings ought to do, because nearly every one prefers to read a book for himself. To end this it would be necessary to begin somewhere, and a good first step would be to hang all professors of elocution. These men declare war on rhythm; yet whether in prose or verse, rhythm is the thing that matters. Again, your professional teaches the pupil to be slow, to make long gasping pauses, and yet in reading prose a reader's chief merit is to get over the ground. Verse is another matter; here the voice may justifiably hang on the rhythm; but in reading narrative or argument, the most golden voice will not compensate for any lagging behind the natural action of the mind. And here is a point that is worth considering. Nowadays people think it worth while to put their bodies through many gymnastics to obtain grace and strength. They train their voices without the rudiments of education, and the result is woefully present with us in the fashionable woman's high-keyed monotonous staccato. Yet after all there is nothing pleasanter, and there is nothing more subjugating, than a voice that has sweetness and variety, power and range; and there is no better way to mend a bad voice or perfect a good one than by learning to read easily and flexibly, so that the living organ evokes the life which lies immanent in words vitally constructed. Many a gracious woman takes into the world a grace and a charm acquired beside the cot or in the children's

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hour; since for nursery uses, and almost alone for these, is the ancient art still practised. Almost, yet not quite; for good poets still have the kind of prolonged existence which George Eliot aspired to in her only good poem; and they may find their life renewing itself whenever and wherever a lover reads their verses to his mistress, whether by the glowing hearth in winter, or, better still, in mossy places among trees, or under shining sun and wind somewhere within hearing of the sea.

*From "For Second Reading"*

## A SUNDAY IN DONEGAL

'E were late arriving at the old chapel, and the first thing that met us was the sight—less familiar, perhaps, in any other country than in Ireland—of worshippers kneeling outside the open door, unable to find room within. As we passed behind them, we could see the priest in his robes administering the Communion; his figure was silhouetted against daylight, for the door in the south transept also was open, and beyond it the kneeling congregation overflowed on that side also under the sky. Between the priest and us was the huddled mass of women, who sat apart from the men. There was scarcely a hat among them. Shawls and handkerchiefs—red, orange, blue, purple, buff, and brown of every conceivable hue—made such a glow of rich and harmonious colour as you will only see in an Irish-speaking district, where the people still dress in a manner that visibly proclaims their nationality. A friend recognised me, and led us up into the gallery facing the chancel—there were three galleries, and all packed as closely as the seats on the floor. From here we could see the men, not wholly so distinctive in their dress as the women, yet for the most part clad in the rough home-spun, undyed, home-woven frieze. Look where you might, your eyes told you that you were in Ireland; and I have never been in any other congregation anywhere which seemed to offer such attractions to a painter. What the European countries generally sacrifice by choosing to wear far-off imitations of what is worn in London and Paris, cannot be counted.



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But it was not the eye only that was affected by this evidence of national distinctness. If there be elsewhere congregations so rapt, I have not seen them. For a moment we felt shame at our intrusion, but the fear of having disturbed worship soon passed off; it seemed as if an earthquake would hardly have broken the spell of that devotion. When the long succession of communicants was done with, the priest read the prayers after Mass, not in Latin nor in English, but in the Irish tongue of those he spoke to. Donegal-bred, he had the accent, at least to my unskilled ear; but he was no native speaker, and when he preached it was in English. All that was needed was the tongue of the people to round off the impression of that discourse. As the young priest stood on the altar-steps, and the old men in their frieze stood by him, touching the very rail, it seemed not so much a religious office as some tribe council, where debate was held on matters homely, yet weighty with significance. The Protestant Church, for all its bareness of ritual, has come far away from that primitive simplicity.

Another thing struck me then as never before, for all I have travelled about Ireland—the strength and the constant maintenance, through the church, of the local bond. As the priest disrobed before the sermon, he gave out subjects for prayer: “You will say now a Pater Noster in Irish for all out of this parish who are in America,” “a Pater Noster and two Hail Marys for those who are in England or Scotland” (that parish is a great home of emigrant labour), “a Pater Noster and three Hail Marys in Irish for the dead that are in this churchyard.” And the heavy rustle of the whispered prayer would go through the crowded transepts like the noise of leaves on a summer evening—bringing the dead and the far-away very near, it

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seemed, to those who then called them into memory. Never at any time in Ireland have I felt so remote from England, Scotland, and all the world as there at that Catholic service—so world-wide, yet so homely.

Outside the church door, when benediction ended and no one was left in the building but the school-master teaching children their catechism in Irish, a ritual more distinctive still was enacted. Perhaps fifty out of that immense congregation made their way into the churchyard, and stood for the most part chatting in a group round the monument to a departed priest. But a few women there detached themselves from the rest, and, each of them picking her way through the grass to a grave-stone or the little cross that marked a tomb still simpler, knelt down, and, bending forward, pressed her face close to the ground. Then—from the very earth it seemed—there rose a faint crying, hardly louder at first than a cricket's noise—swelling, dying down, swelling again, yet always so faint that out there in the open it was hardly audible ten yards off, unless one strained to hear it. But then a woman raised the chant from a grave just beside us; and, as one listened to her cry near at hand, and the other faint wailings, all chanted to the same heartrending little tune, they seemed to fill all earth and heaven. It was like the cry, not of this or that wife or mother, but of the land itself—a voice issuing here from among the graves—the wailing of Ireland after her scattered sons. I have heard the keen before from many voices raised together at a funeral, but never elsewhere have I met this weekly renewing of the wail, this melancholy mingling of separate keenings, each mourning its own loss; and it would break your heart to listen to it.

Away from the church was a very different gathering around the post-office, where men and women crowded

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and jostled as the postmaster read out names. Well they might look to the post, with the four or five hundred of their men away at the harvesting. It was all a part of the weekly reunion, when these mountaineers and fisher-folk gathered from many miles around have sight and speech of one another. The week centres round Sunday. The church is the meeting point of life for a whole country-side; and I think the rest of us, not Catholics, who care for Ireland, when we are brought face to face with the Catholic Church at such times and in such places, must feel toward it almost as if it was our own, because it is so deeply interwoven with all the life that is most Irish in Ireland.

*From "For Second Reading"*

## A GREAT IRISH CHARACTER

ENGLAND very justly prides itself on producing what are called "men of character"—people who conform to a nationally accepted type of conduct and belief, who bear on them the stamp, either of English commercial life at its best, or, still more characteristically, of the English public school. 'Character' means something that they have in common, like a sealed pattern; one man of character may be relied on in a difficult pass to do what another man of character would have done. In Ireland, a less disciplined country, we produce 'characters'—something quite different—something like what in eighteenth-century English was called "an original." The French keep the word, but their horror of eccentricity gives it an accent of condemnation, as if *un original* were somehow anti-social. In Ireland—and perhaps I may be permitted to thank heaven for it—a 'character' is still regarded with a mixture of affection, amusement, and pride.

No place has been richer in its output of characters than Trinity College, Dublin, for no place is more Irish, if one may use the word as describing that nation which Trinity College has served—the nation of Goldsmith, Burke, Wolfe Tone, Grattan, Fitzgibbon, Lever, Isaac Butt, and Sir Robert Ball. Each and all of these were 'characters,' and each in his varying way representative of the still inchoate composite nation which Swift, more than any other man, brought into being; and Swift was the greatest of all 'characters.' He is to English-speaking Ireland

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something of what Burns is to the Scotch—an influence affecting the whole national way of thinking, speaking, and acting.

Take in this century three successive Provosts of Trinity—Salmon, Traill, and Mahaffy: all of them were 'characters,' and two were great men. Traill, who had no intellectual distinction, and who, to speak plainly, was appointed because so many people wanted to keep Mahaffy out, was nevertheless original to the verge of eccentricity. All that could be predicted of his action was that he would go his own way with complete disregard of public opinion, even in his own community; and since he was in his own way very able, this gave him a personal value which he would certainly never have possessed had he not grown up in society that welcomed rather than repressed individual peculiarities. But Salmon and Mahaffy, who would have been remarkable anywhere, attained in Dublin a perfectly unchecked development. It seemed to show in the very bodies of these big, untidy, loose-jointed men, each wearing even his clothes as no one else did. One thinks of them together to-day, because they stood out, and because both in their writings had that robust force and that weight of personality behind an ironic phrase which they inherited from Swift. But they were no comrades, and the last thing to have been expected from either was a just estimate of the other. Yet perhaps one would have got it from Mahaffy, who, for all his spleenful habits of speech, was fundamentally large-minded and generous, and who never lost an opportunity to recognise anything that went to the credit of the university in which he spent his life.

I am writing here of the man, and not of his learning, which I cannot attempt to assess. Henry Jackson, one of the most famous among English scholars (himself a

## A GREAT IRISH CHARACTER

character in our Irish sense), said to me once that Mahaffy got the name for being superficial because people thought knowledge so extended must be shallow; but that he had really done as much work in three or four branches as would have earned him a European reputation in any one of them. The truth is that, like most other remarkable Irishmen, he belonged to the eighteenth century, from which Ireland has never thoroughly emerged; and the eighteenth century had no place for specialists. Yet in scholarship he was all on the side of the moderns, and thereby temperamentally opposed to the rival star of his period—Tyrrell, the purest of purest classics—and yet another ‘character.’ Many under-valued Mahaffy, because they could see, if only from his English style, that he lacked the sense of form—a quality which Tyrrell possessed supremely. But Greek and Latin, which to Tyrrell were exquisite examples of linguistic form, embodied in the strict bounds of two great literary periods, were to Mahaffy the keys to the history of two great world-civilisations which intertwined through many centuries and ramified out in a hundred directions. Tyrrell’s interest was in Latin and Greek; Mahaffy’s in the Greeks and Romans. Scholarship is a word with many meanings, and to condemn Mahaffy because he was not Tyrrell is like blaming Browning because he did not write like Tennyson.

The most controversial aspect of Mahaffy’s erudition was in the points where it touched Irish history. Here, as everywhere, he added to knowledge; and here, as everywhere, he went to the living sources—but with a limitation. What interested him was Anglo-Irish history. His study of the foundation of Trinity College itself, his study of the old Georgian houses in

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Dublin, even of the College plate—all these things brought detail and reality into our picture of the past. But there was always in him, and especially in his old age, a freakish disposition to annoy the rather undignified propensity of Nationalist Ireland to regard historic discussion as an insult to the present if it were not sufficiently reverential to the past. This is an attitude which has much justification in the fact that the denial of national freedom was often based on a perverted view of past history; but over-sensitiveness invites attack, and Mahaffy never failed to attack it—and in doing so often compromised his own reputation. He was ignorant of Irish, and he would never allow himself to see how great a disqualification this imposed—as if one should propose to write the history of India solely from British documents. At all events, whenever he came on anything in his reading which gave colour to the view that English invaders came to Ireland and found a race of savages, he was sure to publish it abroad on the first unsuitable occasion. Such utterances bear the same relation to history as election pamphleteering, and it is a pity that he made so many of them. They blinded people to the fact that he lost his chance of succeeding Salmon as Provost by advocacy of a proposal which would have made Dublin University in reality common ground for Catholics and Protestants.

Yet, as we had occasion to see in the Irish Convention of 1917, the average Nationalist Irishmen were fond of Mahaffy and proud of him, and refused to be annoyed when he was provocative, as he was there on more than one occasion. They accepted him as a character, and let him follow out his humour; and when he said a wise or witty thing—and he said not a few—they were delighted to see a famous Irishman at the top of his form.

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They saw him there in many of the aspects in which he liked to display himself—as the sportsman, for instance. A keen fisherman, he was always protesting that Ireland had a gold mine in its rivers and lakes if preservation and hotel-keeping were better managed. Many were his denunciations of the national injury done by poaching: I was more impressed by his casual observation that he had shot snipe that winter—in his eightieth year. He liked us to know that he was a landed gentleman and high sheriff of his own county of Monaghan. Generally, of course, he was a declared aristocrat. But the opinions and the attitude of mind which Sir Walter Scott, for instance, held naturally and instinctively a century ago, seemed like an affectation when Mahaffy put them forward—so much has the world's tone changed in such matters. Nobody ever less concealed a foible than he his cult of social position—and especially of royalties. And, after all, if a man of great learning and reputation lays himself out to be invited by potentates, there are many more vulgar forms of recognition. Personal contact with the motive personalities of States means, above all for so shrewd an observer, the opportunity of studying history in the making. Travel for him meant not merely seeking cities of men, but getting to know their minds; and in this sense he had travelled enormously. He thought travel part of a statesman's equipment, and I remember his saying to me that, except Gladstone, Dilke was the only English politician who had the proper training for his work.

The saying of his which amused me most, and which I remember best, came during a long motor drive when he and I were on a Departmental Committee on inland fisheries in 1911. He began to question me about the Home Rule Bill, then in preparation.



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Would there be two Chambers? I thought so, the upper one not hereditary, but with some people there of right—distinguished ecclesiastics, for instance. I spoke without malice, but he began almost to purr like a great cat. “I abhor Home Rule,” he said; “my detestation of it always increases. Yet, it would not be without a certain satisfaction that I should find myself in the last days of my life addressing an Irish House of Peers.” He voted for Home Rule in the end, at the Convention, and gave his reason plumply—the failure of the present system. Turning to the Ulster group, he said: “You think you owe your prosperity to the British Government. Quite wrong. You owe it to your own magnificent qualities. The British Government has done nothing for you. Against whom did you propose to rebel? Against the British Government.”

He wound up that most successful apologia for his own conversion by an admonition against the prevailing Irish vice—patriotism. “Patriotism is like alcohol. Taken in moderation it is healthful, stimulating, and, as we know—as we all know—not unpalatable. But taken in excess, like pure alcohol, it is a deadly poison.”

I wish he had lived to sit in an Irish House of Peers or other potentates. The Senate is a duller place without him.

Whether he could be called a great man, I am not sure; but he was a great ‘character’—and a great Irish character. One trait stamps his fidelity to national tradition. Like many other scholars he loved good wine, and I have no reason to know that he ever said a word against the port which Oxford and Cambridge venerated. But the Irish tradition looked to Bordeaux not to Oporto, and he prided himself on his connoisseurship in claret; he was as proud of the

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Laffitte in the college cellar as of the priceless silver which Trinity could set on the board. As proud ? no, but prouder ; for the plate Trinity must keep, but the claret it could give to its guests.

*From " Saints and Scholars "*

## BOOKS THAT PUT ME TO SLEEP

A GENTLEMAN asked me the other day whether I would advise him to buy a particular book—a book of poems. I may observe in passing that this is an unfair question to put to any writer, because his duty to the guild of letters constrains him to encourage the unusual but praiseworthy impulse and say, “Buy”; yet his conscience may probably prompt him to say, “Do not.” However, my acquaintance was determined to make the problem very definite. “Is it a book I shall want to read six times?” he hastened to add, “because if not, I do not want it. I never buy a book unless I think I shall read it six times.” This was a definition with a vengeance; yet while I protested as a writer of books, I approved as a reader. To re-read is a finer pleasure than to read, for the man who cares about literature. Nobody has such good cause, or rather such sad cause, to know this as a reviewer whose business keeps him eternally reading new books—books which he has never seen before, and in nine cases out of ten (to put it moderately) never wishes to see again. For my part—if I may indulge the passion of autobiography—if I ever read a book gratuitously it is when I administer to myself a novel as a sleeping draught. But by no means every novel will do.

Among the books over which I have gone to sleep—and they are past counting—I distinguish sharply from the many volumes which have forced me unwillingly to somnolence those few which have helped me to go to sleep; and only to the latter I am grateful.

They are, all of them, works which were originally

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anything but incentives to slumber; they would have kept me out of bed at the first reading; but when the story was known, when the mere instinct of curiosity had been gratified (not perhaps only by one reading), when the fortunes of the hero and the distressful damsel no longer weighed upon my soul, then these books began to be gentler delights. They might keep me late for dinner, certainly for church, but they would not interfere with all earthly considerations of prudence or decorum. I would not say that the pleasure of re-reading a really good story ranks first among the joys of a book-lover. It is assuredly not true that the pleasure increases almost indefinitely as the thing grows more and more familiar, as is the case with the best essays and poems; but it is a great pleasure, and quite different in kind from that which either poems or essays can give. These quicken thought; the good novel, and it alone, can reduce into tranquil quiescence a brain that insists upon working on when bidden to cease.

The habit of reading in bed, which everybody condemns and practises, began with most of us at school, when it had the charm of the forbidden. The chance generally came when one was made a prefect, and was enjoined to prevent other boys from reading—an injunction very naturally construed as a permission to read oneself; though this interpretation was not flaunted in the face of authority. A hand was always prompt to come down upon the candle flame if a tutor's step was heard approaching, so that no smouldering or smoking wick should lead to needless inquiries. The habit continued at college, and then one did not always read with a view to sleep. It must have been in December, 1882, that I took a story which had been commended to me and went to bed. It was

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*Treasure Island.* About four o'clock I got up, shaking all over with nervous excitement, and went to rummage in my scout's hole for a candle to replace the one that was guttering in the socket. I never was rash enough again to begin a new Stevenson after midnight, but a deep allegiance to literature dates from that night. As a rule, indeed, I had more wit than to read new novels in bed, for I have seldom been able to lay down a story unfinished; and there were enough impediments to sleep as it was in that queer little bedroom on the second floor in Brasenose. A great chestnut tree that grew in Exeter gardens swept the windows with its heavy green branches; doves cooed there continually and a most debauched nightingale sang, not as nightingales should when people want music after dinner, but just about sunrise. And on nights that, after the fashion of college, had prolonged themselves over interminable talk, the nightingale was an annoyance when at last one did get to bed. I have thrown my soap at it, in defiance of all poetic emotions. But in those days it did not matter if one slept or not. Nevertheless, on the whole, it was advisable to sleep, and the book that (after *Treasure Island*) is most closely associated for me with that room is, oddly enough, Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Why I should have chosen it to read myself to sleep with I cannot imagine, but I read it steadily by small doses in bed for a couple of terms, and it speaks ill for my imagination that the guillotine never haunted my dreams.

But indeed if one's body is sound, dreams shape themselves with very little reference to the last thing that occupies the mind. Not long ago, however, a sickness prevented me from reading to myself, and, wanting to be read to, I demanded *Vanity Fair*. I never knew before quite how good it was; but it was

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too good. It became an obsession in my fever, and after I had spent some hours of sleep in watching with painful intensity the play played where Becky stabs Agamemnon (but in my dream she really stabbed him) I stopped the reading.

Instead of Thackeray we tried Miss Austen, and she never disturbed my dreams. Indirectly it was the cause of tribulation to me, for I wrote an article about her which led to much dispute, but for the moment it was soothing. Yet in my normal state I would never prescribe to myself *Pride and Prejudice* as a means to sleep. The story to take one out of all one's worldly concerns must be more moving and engrossing than I have ever found these delicate masterpieces. Thackeray, for years, I took at his own word, and he fulfilled for me the kind office that he wrote of. But, alas! I was set to edit Thackeray, and could no longer read him without the *arrière-pensée* of something that might be said in a preface. And so I fall back, not unwillingly, on Scott. For I know by experience that wherever and whenever I take up a Waverley novel—it matters little which—at the end of ten minutes I shall be under the spell of the magician. I shall be engrossed in the fortunes of a set of people quite familiar to me, but always companionable; the large and leisurely flow of the narrative will carry me along not impetuously or jerkily, but smoothly and strongly; I shall be listening as a child listens to the ten-times-told story, with a child's pleasure in the known incidents and with a grown-up enjoyment of their natural sequence, the vividness of the narration, and the life which breathes in each word the personages speak. These things will hold me with delight, yet not with curiosity, till I have forgotten all my own concerns; and when I have heard enough I shut the book and go to sleep, fresh

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from the sane and happy presence that is still preserved in its pages. Dumas, I think, would do as well, or Fielding. But your modern masters, stripped and pared like Stevenson, or, like Meredith, packed with hard thinking, are not for such uses. The older, happier, more genial creations are those to which I at least owe specially, for this gift of forgetfulness, my thanks and blessing.

*From "For Second Reading"*

## SILK OF THE KINE

THERE is a curious aloofness about cows. All the other animals which man has tamed, man has petted, and the animals, apparently, have liked it and responded. If there be anything in the tie of fosterage, cows ought to have a place in our affections not far from the highest, for to most of us (nowadays) they replace our mothers. Yet I see no sign of recognition, whether in man or cow. Perhaps man is restrained by a sense of the extreme indecency, the horror even, which would ensue if at some later day he should dine off her members whom once he regarded as his foster-mother ; since nothing less than this pricks through the callous hide of our carnivoracity. We let our children make pets of lambs—and very pretty pets they are ; but how we can look either child or lamb in the face passes, or should pass, human comprehension. At all events, whatever be the reason, in some obscure way the relations between man and cow-beasts differ from those which link us to dog or cat, horse or donkey. Pigs, beneath an unprepossessing exterior, often conceal, when they are at liberty, discriminating affections—and disinterested, since the object is often not the dispenser of food. A pig attached itself to Sir Walter Scott, and gambolled about him whenever it was able to ; and I knew an old gentleman in the North of Ireland who was constantly escorted about his farm by a lean and formidable monster of the greyhound type. Yet I never heard that even Sir Walter received tokens of attachment from either cow or calf.



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Dogs and cats are, of course, in nine cases out of ten mere pensioners on our affections; we keep them for friends, for companions, or for the luxury of touch and eye, to caress and be caressed. Your horse, your donkey, are beasts of service, no doubt, but how easily relations of affection with them are established! They will whinny to you, almost talk to you by sound, they will welcome you by gesture; it is part of their nature. One sight is for ever printed on my memory (I do not know in what county, nor even in what country, whether England or Ireland)—a big dray-horse lumbering along a road, walking unled, and the carter, heavy and lumbering as he, walking beside on a raised footpath. I can still see the sudden, ungainly movement with which the big head and neck reached out sideways, and nuzzled heavily against the man's arm; and I can hear the rough, all but laughing tenderness of the carter's voice, "Give over, you old fool!" No cow that ever I saw or heard of bestows on any human being any such endearment. And yet among themselves they are prodigal of caresses. Watch them in a field. The prettiest thing I saw when I owned a few acres was the sight of twin calves, beautifully made and marked, which, until they were almost full yearlings, never grazed two yards apart, never lay but touching one another's flanks.

There must be some curious intimate barrier which separates our race from theirs at the gateway where between us and the other domestic animals communications pass so easily by touch. And yet how close the words are—*kine* and *kin*! In a true sense, none of the kindly beasts are so near to us, for none have such need of our ministrations. Sheep *yeen* unaided; but when a cow is in labour, it is as if you tended on a human being, patient, responsive, gentle, grateful for help.

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And what a picture it is of maternity—the mother-beast's wild-eyed wonder and triumph over the wet new-born thing that you sprinkle with meal, so that her great tongue, sweeping over it like a scythe through grass, may feed herself while she thinks only to lick her youngling dry. There is a queer, high-pitched lowing uttered over the new-born calf, excited and almost tremulous, distinct from any sound heard from cattle at other times, and strangely moving. It has exultation in it—exultation over the thing born, far more than the joy of deliverance. The man (or the woman) who could put that note into a poem would write what has not been written yet.

And in truth, for all the separation that I speak of, primitive humanity recognises the closeness of the bond. No peasant in the West of Ireland will give his daughter in marriage without giving a heifer with her; it is part of the family life, vital to the home. Again, a man's worth is most primitively stated by the number of cattle that he owns—they are 'personality' in the fullest sense. That is recognised, too, in a horrible way, by primitive savagery; cattle maiming is more than a mere doing of injury, it is an insult, an indignity, as though the man were mutilated himself. Literally, this is true, since, whenever such things happen in Ireland (rarely now, thank God), those who maim know perfectly well that the owner will be compensated to the value, and more than the value, at the public charge.

Another aspect of the same fact—this sense of extended personality—is the Irishman's passion for owning cattle; and it is another aspect which leads to trouble. I could name half a dozen successful merchants in Connaught, whose business is more than

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sufficient to occupy their whole time, but who, none the less, persist in coupling it with speculation in live-stock. As a shrewd observer put it, they would waste half of any day running after the tail of a bullock. To be a judge of beasts is the most reputed connoisseurship; to buy and sell skilfully the supreme triumph. A man will come back from the market with the glow of victory on his face because he has got a pound more than was looked for in a bargain. The exhilaration of these contests is the one thing known that will make early risers of Irishmen. I have come from Galway on a fair day, leaving at six in the morning, and the train was full of people who had already transacted their day's business; the fair was virtually over.

All this gambling in live-stock (for it is a gamble, and the cattle-market in Dublin, a wonderful sight, is to our city what the Exchange is to London) does not show the pleasantest side of the relation between man and beast. Apart from the question of man *versus* bullock in Ireland, it is only on the little farms that cattle are treated as members of the family. On the great ranches they are almost wild; on the big dairy-farms each cow is only one milk-producing unit, and the calves live or die very much at a venture. Out of half a dozen heifers that I bought in a bunch, one was unlike the others, gentle and friendly. "You would know it on her," said my man to me; "that one was brought up tied to a bed-post." In truth, kine and kin are very close in Ireland; it was not for nothing that the lovely word of praise, "Silk of the Kine," originated among us. And of all modern artists who have painted cattle, the one who most felt their beauty, the large dignity of cows, the exquisite fineness of line in young beasts, the softness that subdues the

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angular shape of calves, was Walter Osborne, whose early death robbed the world of more than the world knew, and Ireland of far more than Ireland could afford to lose.

*From "For Second Reading"*

## THE SHANACHY

THERE is nothing better known about Ireland than this fact: that illiteracy is more frequent among the Irish Catholic peasantry than in any other class of the British population; and that especially upon the Irish-speaking peasant does the stigma lie. Yet it is, perhaps, as well to inquire a little more precisely what is meant by an illiterate. If to be literate is to possess a knowledge of the language, literature, and historical traditions of a man's own country—and this is no very unreasonable application of the word—then this Irish-speaking peasantry has a better claim to the title than can be shown by most bodies of men. I have heard the existence of an Irish literature denied by a roomful of prosperous educated gentlemen; and, within a week, I have heard, in the same county, the classics of that literature recited by an Irish peasant who could neither write nor read. On which part should the stigma of illiteracy set the uglier brand?

The Gaelic revival sends many of us to school in Irish-speaking districts, and, if it did nothing else, at least it would have sent us to school in pleasant places among the most lovable preceptors. It was a blessed change from London to a valley among hills that look over the Atlantic, with its brown stream tearing down among boulders, and its heathy banks, where the keen fragrance of bog-myrtle rose as you brushed through in the morning on your way to the head of a pool. Here was indeed a desirable academy, and my preceptor matched it. A big, loose-jointed old man, rough,

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brownish-grey all over, clothes, hair, and face; his cheeks were half-hidden by the traditional close-cropped whisker, and the rest was an ill-shorn stubble. Traditional, too, was the small, deep-set, blue eye, the large, kindly mouth, uttering English with a soft brogue, which, as is always the case among those whose real tongue is Irish, had no trace of vulgarity. Indeed, it would have been strange that vulgarity of any sort should show in one who had perfect manners, and the instinct of a scholar, for this preceptor was not even technically illiterate. He could read and write English, and Irish too, which is by no means so common; and I have not often seen a man happier than he was over Douglas Hyde's collection of Connacht love-songs, which I had fortunately brought with me. But his main interest was in history—that history which had been rigorously excluded from his school training, the history of Ireland. I would go on ahead to fish a pool, and leave him pouring over Hyde's book; but when he picked me up, conversation went on where it broke off—somewhere among the fortunes of Desmonds and Burkes, O'Neills and O'Donnells. And when one had hooked a large sea-trout, on a singularly bad day, in a place where no sea-trout was expected, it was a little disappointing to find that Charlie's only remark, as he swept the net under my capture, was: "The Clancartys was great men too. Is there any of them living?" The scholar in him had completely got the better of the sportsman.

Beyond this historic lore (which was really considerable, and by no means inaccurate) he had many songs by heart, some of them made by Carolan, some by nameless poets, written in the Irish which is spoken to-day. I wrote down a couple of Charlie's lyrics which had evidently a local origin; but what I sought

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was one of the Shanachies who carried in his memory the classic literature of Ireland, the epics or ballads of an older day. Charlie was familiar, of course, with the matter of this "Ossianic" literature, as we all are, for example, with the story of Ulysses. He knew how Oisín dared to go with a fairy woman to her own land; how he returned in defiance of her warning; how he found himself lonely and broken in a changed land; and how, in the end, he gave in to the teaching of St Patrick ("Sure how would he stand up against it?" said Charlie), and was converted to Christ. But all the mass of rhymed verse which relates the dialogues between Oisín and Patrick, the tales of Finn and his heroes which Oisín told to the Saint, the fierce answers with which the old warrior met the Gospel arguments—all this was only vaguely familiar to him. I was looking for a man who had it by heart.

The search for the repositories of this knowledge leads sometimes into strange contrasts. One friend of mine lay stretched for long hours on top of a roof of sticks and peat-scraws which was propped against the wall of a ruined cabin, while within the evicted tenant, still clinging to his home as life clings to the shattered body, lay bedridden on a lair of rushes, and chanted the deeds of heroes; his voice issuing through the vent in the roof, at once window and chimney, from the kennel in which was neither room nor light for a man to sit and record the verses.—My own chance was luckier and happier. It came on a day when a party of us had set out in quest of a remote mountain lough. Our way led along the river, and as we drove up to where the valley contracted, and the tillage land decreased in extent and fertility, the type of the people changed. They were Celts and Catholics, evident to the least practised eye. A little farther still from

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civilisation we reached the fringe that was Gaelic not merely in blood; the kindly woman whose cottage warmed and sheltered us when we returned half-foundered from plunging through bogs was an Irish speaker. She had no songs herself, but if I wanted them her neighbour, James Kelly, was the best of company, and would keep me listening the length of a night.

I pushed my bicycle through a drizzle of misty rain up the road over mountainous moor before I saw his cottage standing trim and white under its thatch in a screen of trees, and, as I was nearing it, the boy with me showed me James down in a hollow, filling a barrow with turf. He stopped work as I came down, and called off his dog, looking at me curiously enough, for, indeed, strangers were a rarity in that spot, clean off the tourist track, and away from any thoroughfare. One's presence had to be explained out of hand, and I told him exactly why I had come. He looked surprised, and perhaps a little pleased, that his learning should draw students. But he made no pretence of ignorance; the only question was, how he could help me. Did I want songs of the modern kind, or the older songs of Finn Mac-Cool? If it was the latter, it seemed I was not well able to manage the common talk, and these songs were written in "very hard Irish, full of ould strong words."

I should like to send the literary Irishmen of my acquaintance to one by one converse with James Kelly as a salutary discipline. He was perfectly courteous, but through his courtesy there pierced a kind of toleration that carried home to one's mind a profound conviction of ignorance. People talk about the servility of the Irish peasant. Here was a man who professed his inability to read or write, but stood perfectly secure in his sense of superior education. His respect for me



## CLASSICS OF THE TABLE

IT may be objected that Lucien Tendret is scarcely well known enough to be called a classic. The sole edition of his book, *La Table au Pays de Brillat-Savarin*, was printed at Belley thirty years ago, and is unprocurable. Yet he is in the great succession. Like Brillat, he was a lawyer, born at Belley (practising at Culoz, by the Lac du Bourget), but, unlike Brillat, he never strayed beyond his province. He was, it appears, an actual practitioner of cooking, and his book is full of enticing recipes, intricate as some old masterpiece of interlaced design. But it abounds in anecdote; for instance the history of the nuns of Bons, a village between Belley and Pugieu, on the banks of the Furans. The conduct of these ladies gave occasion for scandal, especially their excessive devotion to the crayfish with which the Furans abounds. The Bishop of Belley came down to reprimand them, and the nuns replied that they took orders only from the Abbé de St Sulpice. Three months later the bishop came back, only to find the gates barred against him. So by his orders a canon of the cathedral got a ladder, propped it against the convent wall, and from this eminence read a sentence of excommunication to the nuns—who crowded in the courtyard below, making, it is reported, “many indecorous gestures” to express their contempt. Richelieu was called in to interfere, and he ordered them to migrate to Belley and be under supervision. But they did not leave behind their treasures, chief of which was the recipe for cooking crayfish, transmitted to them by the prior of an

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adjoining monastery. The last abbess of Bons, when giving her orders to the lay sister in charge of the kitchen, used always to say, "Sister, you will prepare our crayfish according to the method of M. Le Prieur: may God grant him refreshment, and be merciful to us." Tendret gives the recipe, which he calls, "a brilliant composition in the major excitants." Wine and meat-juice are the base of the liquid in which the cooking is done; brandy is added, then a handful of spices and mixed peppers.

But the sportsman in Tendret is even better than the anecdotist. His description of an old-fashioned French shooting party would fill a British gamekeeper with contempt and abhorrence, yet it has a gaiety that might beguile the most orthodox. Only, for the Frenchman there is no nonsense about not eating your own game; the sportsman follows it to the kitchen, he observes it amorously on the spit before a fire, which must be of wood, for coal gases destroy a delicate bird's aroma; and only certain woods should be used—oak, alder, and vine-stock. Then, passing to the description of the dinner, he characterises the perfect host, who has no need to be rich. Yet if simplicity is the note, every detail should be simple: "Simplicity served by taste is a luxury which millionaires cannot always command." But the orderer of the feast must have a feeling for fine shades; perfection lies in the finish of detail. In the dining-room there should be space, air, and light, and the temperature of a fine spring day; carpets to warm your feet and deaden the noise of service: linen, spotless and odourless, dazzling white, yet not disagreeably stiffened. Quality comes far beyond profusion; but the eye and the nostril should be courted as well as the palate. There can be no good dinner without a table wine that is clear, honest,

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and of pleasant flavour: buy it from a grower with a conscience like Montesquieu's, who was as careful of his vintage as of his literary compositions. It was Montesquieu who wrote to a friend when sending him a present of wine, "You can be sure that you are getting it as I received it from God's hands; no merchant has touched it."

Anybody who has money can offer his guests succulent dishes and famous vintages, says this country-bred Frenchman, but courtesy and charm are not for money to buy. "To make those eat who lack appetite, to make the wit of the witty sparkle, to help the would-be witty to find some witty saying, these are the supreme achievements of the gastronome as host."

To conclude the happy sportsman's dinner as he smokes the cigar of perfect peace, he recommends this prayer: "God, I thank Thee for having created game; I pray Thee to preserve and deliver it from its destroyers. I have dined well, but I cannot give all the world a good dinner. Thou, who art all-powerful, in Thy infinite goodness take away appetite from those who have not the means to eat."

On the 1st of September, when shooting opens, Tendret used to ask his friends to dinner; and when the bag had been brought home, and the birds transmuted into dishes, it was his custom to rise after the soup had been drunk, holding a glass of some old and amber-coloured wine (Virieu, or Manicle or Maretel, who shall say which is the best of those which grow on the slopes of Bugey?), and call upon his friends to drink to the new season's sport and to the ripening grape.

On the 9th of September there was another festival: it was fair-day in the village of Vieu, near Brillat-Savarin's shooting-lodge, and in the old dining-room

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Brillat's grand-nephew, a country doctor, entertained all those who had known the great man. While his bust stood on the mantelpiece, they drank the wine from the vineyard that once was his, and they ate *pâté*, shaped like a pillow, which was called in honour of his mother, "l'oreiller de la Belle Aurore." You can find the recipe in Tendret. But it is much better to go and have it made for you by M. Pernollet, the great exponent of classic tradition in the birthplace of these classics: or, if Belley be too far, ask M. Prosper Montagné for it in Paris (at the Rue de l'Echelle), and in a few moments' talk you may find how much *bonhomie*, how much learning, and how much charm are still preserved by the highest practitioners of this most French amongst the arts.

*From "In Praise of France"*

## TREASURE TROVE

*In Memory of E. W. HENNELL, whose  
treasure trove, here celebrated, is now in the  
British Museum*

IT is very difficult for a person who is keenly interested in life at first hand to enter into the joys of a collector. What is new, what is in the making, what holds in it perhaps the seed of the future, has little attraction for the picker-up of rarities: he dredges for the wreckage of the past. And yet, by an odd inconsistency, he is most vividly alert to capture something that shall make the past seem present—some piece of flotsam which, instead of suffering the common fate, has lingered in a back eddy, and now passes, belated, on its way to that annihilation of all material objects, from which his drag-net can give it a short or a long reprieve. The collector, as I conceive him, has a double function. Sometimes he brings up out of the flood objects whose real beauty entitles them to be treasured—things of intrinsic value. But, more often, his choicest spoils are such as in themselves have no claim to be rescued from the general doom, yet, for the sake of some man or some event whose memory has been preserved, inherit a worthy place in our regard. We are grateful to the collectors, almost as to the historians, yet I cannot but wonder at them. There are hundreds of highly intelligent men who would have paid high for Lord Edward Fitzgerald's snuffbox, but would not have crossed the street to see Parnell. Once indeed that

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the uncrowned king was fairly under ground, and on his way to become a legend, they would prick their ears at the mention of his name: but they follow the precept in Aristotle, and will always wait to see the end.

In presence of these votaries of the past I feel myself rebuked for crudity. The present with its stirring life is, after all, so obvious, so intrusive; it has not the settled dignity of what comes down. And if I do not envy, I admire the more, their latest acquisition, the authentic treasure trove. Yet my friends, the well-turned legs of whose Chippendale I praise heart-whole—*teretesque suras integer laudo*—whose first editions I handle with discreet enthusiasm—whose portfolio-guarded prints I care for perhaps as much as they do, yet without the desire of possession—would rather, I know, see the ill-repressed twinge of jealousy in a rival hunter's face, or detect in his voice the light inflection of spleen. The charmed circle which I never enter is a circle of their dearest enemies.

Still, from the outside, I distinguish sharply between collector and collector. The stamp-hunter has no place in my regard; he yields basely to the lust of acquisitiveness, anxious only to have what some one else has not. It is a competition over counters, meaningless save for the competition; counters whose value is decidedly their market-price. With all collectors who deserve the name the mere fact of rarity must weigh; and no man need be reckoned seriously in the list who does not pride himself upon a bargain. But there are men who collect not less for beauty than for rarity, or for that skill of workmanship which is almost beauty, and who value the historic and the human interest far beyond any consideration of a selling price. In a word, there are the collectors who have the artist's instinct and the scholar's; there are

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those who have only the passion of the miser for his hoard. And high in the most honourable class would rank the friend whose singular good fortune I have the honour to relate, and whom (after the bygone fashion) I will call simply by his appropriate adjective, Virtuoso.

Virtuoso, then, is a collector born and bred; but not of the tragic variety. He need not deny himself life's comforts, nor scrimp his stomach to fulfil the desire of his eyes. The bragging purchase of some world's wonder in the crowded auction-room is not for him; but neither does he need to pass a treasure for the lack of a mere five pounds. He has no narrow limitations of taste; whatever is rare and fine, whether it come from east or west, from two thousand years back or from the day of our grandfathers, has its interest for him. And for a final perfection—perhaps the most important for the collector's own felicity—Virtuoso has no wife. Was there ever yet a woman who saw with contentment, and with that entire sympathy which an enthusiast must inevitably exact, money transforming itself daily into objects, many of which are expensive, and all of which gather dust?

Virtuoso, then, this model of his kind, had occasion to take his way from a point in the south-western district to the City. The day was unattractive, and he debated in his mind the question of a bus, but decided for the advantages of a constitutional. Observe the finger of Providence. His way took him through a street in Westminster, quite out of his habitual beat, and in that street was a shop, which you or I would have passed unregarding. Not so the collector, whose well-trained eye detected from across the road a brown leather object in the window with a label attached to it, "Izaak Walton's Fishing-Bag." On the face of it, no collector was going to believe that!

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If you saw advertised for sale in a casual window Shakespeare's pen, Nelson's spy-glass, Sir Joshua's palette, would you attach any importance to the label? Still less would a collector, who knows by long experience the wicked ways of dealers. And, in sober earnest, neither Shakespeare's pen nor Nelson's spy-glass, could they be proved genuine, would excite a much keener emulation among collectors than Izaak Walton's fishing-bag.

Fame is an odd thing. Here was a little London linen-draper, a man of parts, no doubt, distinguished by his friends, distinguished by the trust reposed in him, but still a linen-draper living in a very quiet way, who in the evening of his life published a little book about his favourite recreation. And to-day, for the English-speaking race, there is one Abraham, one Jacob, one Rachel, one Rebecca, and so on, but there are two Isaacs. The draper disputes the patriarch's monopoly: one is thankful to him at times for having adopted a different spelling of the name. Is this hyperbole? I hardly think so. But at all events consider the case of Dr Donne. Donne was Dean of Saint Paul's (in itself no small position), a dean famous for his eloquence, for his subtlety, and also all-famous for his conversion; marked with that romantic halo which distinguishes the saint who once has enjoyed a very different reputation. For this dean was the author of poems, as we all know, which he suppressed indeed, but which none the less circulated, until, with his good will or without it, Donne occupied to Ben Jonson much the same relation as Browning bore to Tennyson in the estimation of contemporaries. Donne's poetry survives, I know; it is read by the handful of literary persons who really read, and who read poetry; but of this illustrious figure, poet, orator,



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divine, dignitary, what does the world know? Why, that Walton wrote his life. Or take again Sir Henry Wotton, a great courtier, a great diplomatist, a fine poet, courteous and affable, one who unbent so far as to go fishing with the accomplished little Fleet Street trader. To-day there are forty thousand men who know Walton's name for one who has heard of Wotton. It might seem, indeed, that this were impossible, for are not the two names indissolubly united by Walton's frequent mention of his distinguished friend and quotation of his writings? But the immortal Izaak has risen far beyond the repute that goes with first-hand knowledge; he survives as a personality, like Johnson, vaguely familiar to thousands who never read a line that came from his pen. He is more a genius than a man—the patron saint of his craft.

And now Virtuoso was being asked to believe that he saw before him Izaak Walton's fishing-bag. It was too much for credulity. For generations men had rummaged archives to discuss every little detail of the man's life; and here before him there cropped up what purported to be, not some indifferent relic, a book with his autograph, a piece of his furniture, but the very sign and symbol of his own peculiar mystery—the one thing of all others that a collector could most desire.

It may be said, perhaps, that I attach an undue importance to the relic. The bag is not essential to the angler; the rod is. Granted. And still, if one of the two was miraculously destined to re-emerge, to slip out of its long stay in the back eddy of things—for of course I have to explain that this treasure was no other than the real article—I am glad it was the creel. The rod would have been a disillusionment. It would have brought home to us relentlessly the fact

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which so many gloze over to their imagination, or only whisper to their own souls—that after all Izaak was by the essence and temperament of him addicted to the baser branches of the sport. Let us say it and chance the consequences. He preferred the natural fly to the artificial, and the worm to either. And I greatly fear that if we were confronted with his rod, it would be too apparently of the kind that is naturally left on the bank to fish by itself while the owner sits under a sycamore tree and rhapsodises about the sweet smells of earth and meadow-grass after summer rain.

But the bag—that tells no tales but such as one would gladly hear; and if it is not essential to the act of angling, it is certainly indispensable in more ways than one to the angler's comfort and pleasure. Changes of fashion, modern improvements, have detracted no whit from its respectability; there it is to-day, as sound, strong, and serviceable as it was two hundred and fifty years ago when the Londoner strapped it on his back. That is why Virtuoso bought it.

The bag was a rarity, for one seldom sees a wallet of such a shape; and it was a model of good workmanship. Three pieces of the stoutest leather—such leather as makes the very best portmanteaux—composed the fabric: a flat piece to lie against the back; a large rounded piece, admirably cut and moulded, to make the belly of the bag; another small flat piece for the lid, fastened to the back piece by three brass hinges, and pierced of course with a hole so that fish could be dropped in without opening the lid. The whole shape of the thing as it bellied out was satisfying to the eye, and spoke of a time when craftsmanship was not far removed from art. The colour had darkened with time to that of a much-used football, but the leather was as smooth, and as hard, as polished wood.

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On the back piece was applied a strong strip of leather, through which the strap might run, and the face of this was neatly decorated with an incised pattern. Underneath it was cut with a knife the following inscription :

J. D. ANDERSON

FROM MY FRIEND IZAAK WALTON

1646

Virtuoso paid little attention to the inscription, the work, he presumed, of some ingenious person anxious to give his possession a fictitious value; but at least it detracted nothing from the bag, which he bought and took home as a fine specimen of seventeenth-century leather work. If there lingered in his mind some faint hope that after all the thing might be what it professed itself, that was a human weakness which he did not unduly encourage. It was only after three weeks that the discovery was made. Some word of the relic had got abroad, and a paragraph appeared in an evening paper, stating that Walton's fishing-bag was to be seen at a curiosity shop in Westminster. Virtuoso, like a good collector, cut out the paragraph—chuckling to himself over the fact that the bag was in other keeping than a dealer's—and pasted it on to the object. Observe again the Providence. He fixed it, of course, on the inner side of the lid. The whole interior of the leather had been originally painted with a white enamel, so as to admit of the bag being thoroughly cleansed of all scaliness; and this enamel had cracked in every direction with time. Virtuoso was opening the lid to show this to a friend—not the first friend, by many, to whom the trophy had been displayed—and also to call his attention to the paragraph. The friend read the paragraph and said to the astonished Virtuoso : “ It's all right; there is the man's name ! ”

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And sure enough—oh, rapture!—on the inside of the lid, one on either side of the hole, were branded the consecrated letters, “I. W.” It was possible to miss them owing to the cracks of the enamel—impossible to mistake them once they were pointed out.

Here, indeed, was confirmation. The bag had no pedigree. Either it was genuine or it was not. Against the belief that it was genuine stood the antecedent improbability—hardly to be overstated—that such a relic should so long have survived unnoticed. But the improbable is always happening. Moreover, the lettering of the exterior inscription looked like a modern hand. But, *per contra*, against the theory of forgery stood almost insuperable objections. First, was it possible to give to the initials *inside* the cover that extraordinary appearance of old age? Secondly, if the thing had been forged, was it conceivable that the very point and essence of the forgery should come to be so completely overlooked that a dealer could sell the bag in absolute ignorance that the initials existed? Those two arguments alone seemed to dispose of the idea. Others presented themselves on further thought. Was it likely that any forger should bestow upon the supposed recipient a name not to be traced in Waltoniana (so far as my investigation of elaborate indices has gone)? Or was it at all probable that the date would be one prior and not subsequent to the publication of the *Compleat Angler*? In 1646 seven years had yet to run before the immortal work saw the light.

So far the proof is negative, and merely shows the improbability of forgery. But one can get a step farther. What was Walton doing in 1646? Is there any reason assignable why he should part from a cherished possession? There is. Anthony Wood states

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that in 1643 Walton, whose friends and sympathies were Royalist, left the troubled and unfriendly atmosphere of London for a country retreat at Stafford. But it has since been shown (by Nicolas) that Wood's date is wrong. In December 1645 Walton was in London. It is known, of course, that he was in Stafford, and after the battle of Worcester the King's George, saved from the enemy, was committed to no other person than Walton to hand over to Colonel Blagne for safe custody. I suggest, then, that the date of his departure from London was in 1646, and that in making a clearance of his effects, and in seeking for mementoes to bestow on valued friends, he was led to make this gift to J. D. Anderson.

That Walton used a bag is happily beyond dispute, and he used it, like many another man, to carry more things than fish. Listen to Piscator: "My honest scholar, it is now past five of the clock; we will fish till nine and then go to breakfast. Go you to yonder sycamore tree and hide your bottle of drink under the hollow root of it; for about that time and in that place we will make a brave breakfast with a piece of powdered beef, and a radish or two, that I have in my fish-bag." Yet the bag was not universal, for Cotton in a very similar passage of the Second Part mentions his "fish-pannier."

Another fact may have some bearing on the matter. About 1646 Walton married for the second time, and heaven knows what far-reaching revolution that may have worked in his personal furniture.

I do not think further argument is needed; the thing is, to a plain man's intelligence, beyond dispute. Virtuoso possesses a most enviable relic; we fishermen are a devout folk, we cherish the literature of our pastime; Cobbett's cricket guides are not better known

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than the classics of the angle. And surely to anglers this belonging of the patron of our craft should be a thing hardly less venerable than the sacred Kaabah toward which the Mahomedan would look in his devotions. Virtuoso does well to suppress his name, or the steps of his house had like to become a highway of pilgrimage.

Yet, I confess, one thing is wanting to complete satisfaction. There is the bag, with fair round belly, not immoderate, and yet ample to contain your "great logger-headed chub," or such a trout as that Piscator showed to his disciple for the first-fruits of his skill with the nobler fish: a fish that was warranted "to fill six reasonable bellies"; that was twenty-two inches long when it was taken, and "the belly looked some part of it as yellow as a marigold, and part of it as white as a lily"—and "yet methinks looks better in this good sauce," says Piscator. In that description the fish survives; the bag is here to testify; but who was J. D. Anderson? The boon that fortune may still have in store for Virtuoso is the discovery, first of some further connecting evidence between Walton and a person of that name, and then—but that I fear is impossible—the demonstration that the man to whom the angler, leaving London, consigned the bag that had so often swung from his shoulders as he stretched his legs up Tottenham Hill on the way to Ware and the banks of the Lea, was no other than his honest disciple, Venator of the book.

*From "Fishing Holidays"*



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